

Decline of Indian Parliament: The missing Debates

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Abstract – *The idea of Democracy rests upon the principle of people's participation in Decision making. It is a form of government in which the people have the authority and the choice to choose their representative. India being a parliamentary democracy people choose their representatives to the parliament and these representatives are responsible for putting forward the interests of people in the parliament. The Parliamentary democracy is a platform where the government of the day is held accountable for its actions, policies. It provides people an opportunity where the representative of people can advocate about people's Aspirations, needs. This institution as a whole where Debates, discussion are an integral part of it, benefits the society with informed decision making and better policy alternatives. But in the recent times we have seen the Deteriorating picture of Indian parliament where procedural principles of parliamentary democracy are thrown out the window by the Parliamentarians. We are not paying attention to the things which were at some point considered biggest cornerstone of our democracy (debate, discussion, dissent, participation). The study highlights the recent trends of Indian parliamentary debates, reasons for the decline of Indian parliament and the suggestions to improve.*

Keywords: *Parliament, Democracy, Discussion, Debate, Representative, Government*

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INTRODUCTION

Indian Parliament is the supreme legislative body of India. The law-making powers of the highest legislative body are supreme and an essential part of the functioning of any Parliament. It comprises of the President and the two Houses - Rajya Sabha (Council of States) and Lok Sabha (House of the People). The President has the power to summon and prorogue either House of Parliament or to dissolve Lok Sabha. The Constitution of India came into force on January 26, 1950. The first general elections under the new Constitution were held during the year 1951-52 and the first elected Parliament came into existence in April, 1952

Parliament is not merely a law making body, it is a multi-functional institution performing a wide variety of roles. It has a representative role, being the custodian of the nation's ideals, hopes and faith. Various procedural methods are available to the members under the rules of procedures governing both the Houses of Parliament, to debate, discuss and resolve the problems faced by the nation.

Indian being an Indirect/ Representative democracy where the elected representative of people represent the people in the parliament of India. The parliament is considered as a platform where all the issues

being faced by the society are raised by the elected representatives with common consensus find solution to these problems. The opposition has a great role to play in the parliament ,it acts as an opposing force to the irresponsible and despotic decision making .The opposition is there to balance the power equation ,in the absence of strong opposition it is difficult to keep a check on the government of the day.

In the present times the role of parliament is gaining more importance as with increasing complexities in the society it becomes important for the parliament to ensure that the issues being faced by the society are deliberated upon . It becomes the duty of the representatives of the people to raise issues that are being faced by the people.

The whole idea of parliamentary democracy revolves around

- **Accountability.**
- **Responsibility.**
- **Transparency.**

- Informed decision making.

However, what we are witnessing in our parliament is not very encouraging for our society as whole. The parliament is always running short of time for discussing those issue which require immediate action. There is a decline in procedural practices of the parliament , unnecessary disruptions are causing the parliamentary paralysis in our Democracy.

Trends showing decline of Indian Parliament :

STEADY DECLINE

Lok Sabha	Starting year	Party (Alliance)	Government tenure (days)	Sittings per 100 days of tenure	Average session duration (days)
1	1952	Congress	1,813	37.3	45.1
2	1957	Congress	1,821	31.9	36.3
3	1962	Congress	1,796	32.2	36.1
4	1967	Congress	1,394	33.6	39.1
5	1971	Congress	2,136	28.7	34.1
6	1977	Janata Party Alliance	882	30.3	29.7
7	1980	Congress	1,809	25.6	30.9
8	1984	Congress	1,792	27.1	34.6
9	1989	Janata Dal (National Front)	466	23.4	15.6
10	1991	Congress	1,786	23.7	26.4
11	1996	Janata Dal (United Front)	568	22.0	20.6
12	1998	BJP (NDA)	412	21.4	22.0
13	1999	BJP (NDA)	1,580	22.5	25.4
14	2004	Congress (UPA)	1,827	18.2	22.1
15	2009	Congress (UPA)	1,826	19.6	23.8
16	2014	BJP (NDA)	548	19.6	21.4

One sitting equals one day at the Lok Sabha. Sessions include Budget, monsoon, winter and special sessions.
2014 government data is till November 25, 2015, before the beginning of the ongoing winter session.

Source- live mint/decline of Indian parliament

Inferences from the figure:

- Over the year the productivity of Indian parliament has gone down due to various reasons.
- There is considerable decline in the number of days of parliament in session.
- The number of total parliament sittings during all the session has decreased with every passing year.

Hours of work by Lok Sabha: A comparison over the years



#source- PRS India.

The total hours of work undertaken by the Parliament is witnessing a decline which is not a very good sign for a Democracy. With the increasing population and complexities it is very important for a country to spend more and more time on discussing problem faced by the society and come up with new ideas and solution. In a parliamentary democracy this duty lies with the parliament and if parliament is underperforming it is a big worry for a country as a whole.

CRIMINAL CASES AGAINST LOK SABHA MEMBERS

IN NUMBERS

YEAR	WINNERS ANALYSED	CRIMINAL CASES	SERIOUS CASES
2009	543	162 (30%)	76 (14%)
2014	542	185 (34%)	112 (21%)
2019	539	233 (43%)	159 (29%)

#SOURCE: Hindustan times

The above data shows that nearly 50% of the members of Lok sabha has criminal cases against them .It raises some serious questions like what?? can we expect from such people in terms of their contribution for the people and the society. Do they deserve to sit in the Parliament?? . It puts the sanctity of Indian constitution in question.

Some other indicators of Parliamentary decline are:

- # Shortening of sessions.
- # Time lost due to disruptions in proceedings by the opposition and violation of norms and precedents by the government of the day.
- # Rampant absenteeism of members from Parliament.
- # Actual hours of sitting as a percentage of available hours with parliament.

Reasons for the Decline:

- Fall in Ethical standards of legislators – The Concern of the legislator towards the country and responsibility for the society is declining day by day. The people just want to get inside the parliament to acquire a power position and to get some privileges.
- Reduced number of days of sitting has become a norm in the country, many sensitive issues go unnoticed and there is very less time for discussions on issues that require in depth analysis.

- Dominance of ruling party – frequent ordinances, redefining bills as money bills, not taking into consideration the suggestions of the oppositions party paralyses the whole parliamentary proceedings.
- Criminalization of politics –Almost 50% of the members in current Lok Sabha are from criminal background such leaders raises some serious issues related to the moral authority of the parliament. And there is not much that can be expected out of these members in terms of contribution to the society.
- Party whip acts as a hurdle for many of the members who want to take initiative to come up with something innovative and out of the box thinking.
- Unnecessary disruptions in the house hampers the overall functioning of the parliament.
- Lack of expertise among the members of the parliamentarians resulting in delegated legislation and bureaucratization which has somehow undermined the role of the parliament.
- The attendance of the elected representatives should be legally enforced so that everyone takes it as their duty to be there in the house wherever the Parliament is in session.
- The bills from the private members should also get recognition as they might touch upon things which are missing from the agenda of the concerned minister. Every MP, who is not a Minister, is called a Private Member. Till date, Parliament has passed 14 Private Members' Bills. Six of these were passed in 1956 alone.
- The opposition should be given time to work on their agenda like in British parliament 20 days a year is given to the opposition to form their agenda and to come up with their side of the story

CONCLUSION:

India is the largest democracy in the world and If India wishes to maintain its democratic credentials, parliamentarians must understand that the task of representing the opinions, interests and needs of citizens is their paramount responsibility. Also, a parliamentary government is described as government by discussion. Therefore, by allowing for wider and more impactful participation in parliament, it is possible that some of the causes of disruptions would get rectified. Simultaneously, it may improve the quality of debates if members with more expertise on a given subject are allowed to speak longer in the House. All of these measures would have to be coupled with other capacity building activities such as providing office space to all MPs, access to institutional research support and quality training program in order to both deepen and broaden our democratic polity. In the recent past we have seen the credibility of parliament going down, instances of members fighting among each other, throwing things at each other are very common in the parliament.

Thus, Parliament has shown a considerable decline in terms of institutional capacity. 'Parliamentary paralysis' has seriously eroded the democratic ethos and tradition, with the result that we have inappropriate socio-economic policies and ineffective legislations in place.

In the 1950-60s, Parliament, used to meet, on an average, 125-130 days in a year. This has come down to just 65-70 days in the last decade. It means that the amount of time for which Parliament sits and deliberates has gone down considerably. There is a need to look into this as we live in a world where we need more and more legislations, discussions, debates as society is getting complex day by day. There is need to check

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT:

- There should be a legal codification for the conduct in the house, any sort of deviation from that code of conduct should invite some serious penalties for the offender.
- Number of days of sittings of the Parliament should be increased keeping in mind the growing complex nature of the society and to satisfy the needs of the increasing population it is important that out parliament out in as much as of its time into discussing matters those are bothering the people and come up with solutions to these problems.
- Monetary penalties should be imposed for any any sort of indiscipline and disturbance created by any of the member of the house.
- More powers should be given to the ethics committee so that committee can ensure the smooth functioning of the parliament with its rules and regulations getting a broader reach
- Speaker and the chairman should be given more powers in order to regulate the house in a more effective manner so that any sort of disruption would not lead to the wasting of the time in the house.

criminalization in politics so that people with intention to serve the Nation could come in forefront .We should make full use of the platform that our constitution has provided us to continuously improve upon as a society in the form of Parliament.

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